

Members:

Rep. William Bailey, Chairperson
Rep. Rolland Webber
Rep. Robert Alderman
Sen. Thomas Wyss
Sen. Allen Paul
Sen. William Alexa
Sen. Allie Craycraft



Lay Members:

Terry Smith
John Dahman
James Brown
David Miller

LSA Staff:

Timothy Tyler, Attorney for the Commission
Mark Bucherl, Fiscal Analyst for the Commission

Authority: IC 2-5-20

MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMISSION

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MEETING MINUTES

Meeting Date: July 22, 1998
Meeting Time: 1:30 P.M.
Meeting Place: State House, 200 W. Washington St.,
Room 233
Meeting City: Indianapolis, Indiana
Meeting Number: 2

Members Present: Rep. William Bailey, Chairperson; Rep. Rolland Webber; Rep. Robert Alderman; Sen. Allie Craycraft; Terry Smith; John Dahman; David Miller.

Members Absent: Sen. Thomas Wyss; Sen. Allen Paul; Sen. William Alexa; James Brown.

Representative William Bailey, Chairperson of the Military and Veterans Affairs Commission (MVAC), called the meeting order at 1:35 P.M.

After approval of the minutes from the first MVAC meeting, the first issue discussed was Senate Bill 50-1998. William Jackson, Director of the Indiana Department of Veterans' Affairs (IDVA), stated that SB 50-1998 would have allowed the IDVA, along with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), to certify certain disabled veterans to allow the disabled veterans to qualify for property tax deductions.

Mr. Jackson stated that the current State Board of Tax Commissioners is allowing the IDVA to perform this certification function. However, Mr. Jackson indicated he felt it was still necessary to amend the statute in case a future State Board of Tax Commissioners decided to not allow the IDVA to certify these disabled veterans. He concluded by stating that this IDVA certification would become more important in the near future due to continued VA downsizing.

After a brief discussion, the MVAC members voted six to zero have a new bill draft prepared based on SB 50-1998 to be considered at the next MVAC meeting.

The next issue to be discussed was the Indiana National Guard tuition reimbursement program. Brigadier General George Buskirk, Assistant Adjutant General (Army) of the Indiana National Guard, testified that the Indiana National Guard currently had more than 14,000 members. He stated that 95% of the Indiana National Guard's \$280,000,000 annual budget is federally funded. General Buskirk continued by stating that the Indiana National Guard had lost \$28,500,000 and 1,500 vacancies over the last five years because Indiana could not maintain adequate recruiting strength.

General Buskirk stated that the Indiana National Guard was proposing a tuition exemption program this year, instead of a tuition reimbursement program, to improve Indiana National Guard recruiting strength and retention rates. He stated that, based on the 1994-95 school year, the current proposal would have had a fiscal impact of \$2,220,000, which represents only .0007% of total state school revenue. He stated that this impact should be compared to the \$19,000 per guardsman that is brought into the state and local economies.

Representative Bailey remarked that he thought a tuition reimbursement program would create more of an incentive for a participant to complete classes than a tuition exemption program would. General Buskirk stated that it would still be too much of an economic hardship and a "deal killer" for many participants to pay tuition up front and wait until the end of a semester to receive reimbursement.

In response to questions from MVAC members, John Thurlow, State Education Officer from the Indiana National Guard, stated that current Indiana guardsmen who were students were "very scattered" around the state. He said that no school currently had more than 50 guardsmen as full time students.

Representative Bailey said that this problem might be best addressed as a line item in the budget and handled through the State Student Assistance Commission. General Buskirk said the Indiana National Guard would appreciate any guidance the MVAC could provide concerning this issue and on any "lobbying effort" the Indiana National Guard could perform to support legislation.

Kevin Green from Purdue University testified that fee remissions at the West Lafayette campus currently totaled about \$1,500,000 per year. He stated that he would prefer to "take the universities out of the policy debate" on this issue but he preferred another financial alternative to fee exemptions.

Kathy Smith from Indiana University stated that she too felt it might be best to handle this issue through the State Student Assistance Commission.

Representative Bailey then stated that the Indiana National Guard tuition issue would be discussed again at the next MVAC meeting. He said that it would be easier for the MVAC members to vote on any proposal that contained a "fixed figure" for its fiscal impact.

The next issue the MVAC discussed concerned the renaming or designation of portions of state highways to honor Congressional Medal of Honor recipients from Indiana. Staff discussed IC 9-21-1-4 which currently allows a city or town, by ordinance approved by the Indiana Department of Transportation, to authorize and pay for signs to be erected along the routes of state highways to honor famous persons who are or were residents of the city or town.

Mr. Jackson and Joseph Riley, IDVA Commissioner, both indicated that the organization in Lake County that specifically wishes to honor Congressional Medal of Honor winner Emilio De La Garza may not know of the existence of this statute. They both stated that IC 9-21-1-4 may or may not allow the organization to accomplish what they wish to accomplish.

Representative Bailey stated that he was not convinced the MVAC should endorse any legislation to address this issue considering the current language found in IC 9-21-1-4. He also stated that, if necessary, he would be willing to author resolutions concerning this issue during the 1999 session of the General Assembly.

The next issue discussed by the MVAC concerned a draft letter of support from the MVAC for H.R. 3710 to exonerate Rear Admiral Charles McVay III from responsibility for the sinking of the U.S.S. Indianapolis. After a brief discussion, the MVAC members voted six to zero to have the draft letter prepared for signatures at the next MVAC meeting and subsequently sent to the Members of Congress from Indiana (subject to approval by the Personnel Subcommittee of the Legislative Council).

The next issue discussed by the MVAC concerned the display of the POW/MIA flag at state government buildings. Al Tookolo, President of the Vietnam Veterans for Veterans, presented a previously introduced resolution to the MVAC that urged the State of Indiana to "fly or display the POW/MIA flag on the grounds or in the lobbies of all Indiana State Government Buildings on Armed Forces Day, Memorial Day, Flag Day, [and] Independence Day."

After a brief discussion, the MVAC members voted six to zero to have a new draft of the resolution prepared for the next MVAC meeting.

The next issue discussed by the MVAC was HB 1409-1997 concerning the Desert Shield and Desert Storm bonus. (HB 1409-1997 would have provided for a bonus to be paid to certain members of the armed forces of the United States who: (1) were residents of Indiana for at least six months immediately before the members' enlistment, induction, or call to active duty in the armed forces of the United States; (2) were on active duty during Operation Desert Shield or Operation Desert Storm; and (3) served after July 31, 1990, and before August 1, 1991. It also would have allowed for certain surviving next of kin to receive the bonus if a member of the armed forces of the United States who is eligible to receive the bonus is deceased. HB 1409-1997 specified that the amount of the bonus would be: (1) \$300 for a member of the armed forces who qualifies; (2) \$600 for a member of the armed forces who qualifies and was awarded a Purple Heart or received a disability rating of at least 10% because the person was injured while on active duty; and (3) \$1,000 for the next of kin of a member of the armed forces who qualifies and was killed while on active duty.)

Mr. Dahman stated that most members of the MVAC had supported this legislation for the last three years and should continue to do so.

Mr. Jackson stated that while the language in the bill applied to persons who served after July 31, 1990, and before August 1, 1991, the United States had never officially declared a cessation to hostilities in this geographic region.

After a brief discussion, Representative Bailey stated that the discussion of HB 1409-1997 would continue at the next MVAC meeting.

Representative Bailey then stated that the next MVAC meeting would occur on Tuesday, August 18, 1998, at 1:00 P.M. He adjourned the meeting at 2:25 P.M.